

United States Attorney's Office Northern District of Iowa



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For further information contact:

Bob Teig

(319) 363-0091

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

OVER 40,000 IOWA STUDENTS WARNED ABOUT INTERNET PREDATORS

Middle School Internet Safety Program Reaches 147 Schools in 49 Counties

"Be safe online." That is the message being conveyed this school year to more than 40,000 Iowa students by the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Iowa and others in the District. That also was the message conveyed by United States Attorney Matt M. Dummermuth at a press conference this morning following the federal sentencing of a former Illinois part-time police officer who traveled to Dubuque to have sex with a 13-year-old boy he met online. The boy was one of this Internet predator's 14 teenage victims from four Midwestern states. **[see related press release dated April 23, 2008]**

By the end of this school year, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Iowa will have presented Internet safety assemblies to just under 30,000 students at 101 middle schools. Law enforcement officers and others will have made presentations to approximately 12,500 students in 46 schools. These assemblies at schools in 49 of the 52 counties in the Northern District of Iowa are part of an effort to educate middle schoolers in the District about the dangers they face on the Internet. Internet safety posters are provided to the schools, and students receive a bookmark containing Internet safety information.

Principal Larry Weede from Cherokee Middle School said, "it was one of the best assembly programs we have ever had. When you have students coming up to teachers afterwards to talk about it – you know it has had an effect."

"I don't think many of our students had a very good understanding of the danger they were putting themselves in prior to the presentation," said Assistant Principal Greg Lehman from Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Dubuque. "After hearing the message, they know now how to protect themselves."

"Our presentations are designed to prevent crimes like those involved in the sentencing this morning," said Dummermuth. "While a sexual predator was locked away for over 31 years today, we would much rather stop the crime from occurring. Our message cautions students, as well as their teachers and parents, about Internet predators who seek to sexually exploit children. Middle school students are our target audience because their age group is the most targeted by Internet predators – both nationally and locally."

Noting the Internet has no geographic boundaries, Dummermuth emphasized that every child using the Internet can be exposed to online dangers. "Victims of Internet child exploitation come from big cities and small towns alike, and predators travel here from out-of-state to meet their victims," said Dummermuth.

"It used to be that parents only needed to worry about sexual predators in their local communities," said Dummermuth. "But when children use the Internet, parents now must worry about predators across the country and even around the world. This is why we are educating kids about the dangers lurking on the Internet. By following simple rules, young Internet users can greatly reduce the chance they will be victimized."

Internet safety rules include:

- Do not post personal information online (name, age, birth date, address, telephone number, or school).
- Do not post your picture online – it can be copied or changed.
- Remember that people can lie online and predators often pretend to be kids.
- Do not respond to anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Tell your parents or a trusted adult if someone makes you uncomfortable on the Internet and consider contacting law enforcement.
- Most importantly, do not meet online friends in person without taking a parent or trusted adult along.

For more Internet safety information, go to <http://www.childsafenet.org/> or <http://www.netsmartz.org/>.

The United States Attorney's Office presentations are being made as a part of the United States Department of Justice's Project Safe Childhood initiative. Project Safe Childhood is a joint effort of federal, state, and local law enforcement, along with community leaders, designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the U.S. Attorneys' Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

Besides the United States Attorney and prosecutors from his office, Russ Goebel, Second Judicial District Department of Corrections; Bob Kramer, Cedar Falls Police Department; Chuck Robinson, Kossuth County Deputy Sheriff; Ray Friedrich, Kossuth County Deputy Sheriff; Lt. Dave Beshey, Fort Dodge Police Department; Deb Hale, Public Affairs for Long Lines, LLC - Sioux City; Dennis Linn, Clay County Deputy Sheriff; Chris Garthright-Chwirka, Woodbury County Deputy Sheriff; Carla Granstrom, Mercy Medical Education Coordinator - Sioux City; Jay King, Le Mars Police Department; Sgt. Kent Smock, Black Hawk County Sheriff's Office; Sr. Trooper Mark Domino, Iowa State Patrol; Trooper Mark Sigwarth, Iowa State Patrol; Mike Ferjak, Iowa Department of Justice - Area Prosecutions Division; Trooper Mike Horihan, Iowa State Patrol; Mike Shipley, Excelsior Middle School - Marion; Sr. Trooper Pam Brockman, Iowa State Patrol; Trooper Vince Kurtz, Iowa State Patrol; Warren Leeps, Decorah Police Department; Trooper Brian Senne, Iowa State Patrol; and Waylon Pollema, Sioux County Deputy Sheriff have been involved in Internet safety assemblies at middle schools in the Northern District of Iowa this year.